

Participatory Strategic Planning

in Ponders End, North London

Context

ICA:UK was contracted by Going for Green and the Ponders End Development Forum to facilitate a two day Community Action Planning Event as part of the wider Ponders End Sustainable Communities Project. The aim of this project was to empower and enable the residents and communities of Ponders End to address their local economic, social and environmental concerns, and improve their quality of life. The event was held at Enfield College in October 2001. It was attended by a total of 22 participants including residents, representatives of local groups and businesses, service providers and Enfield Council officers. One ICA:UK facilitator was assisted by three trained facilitators from among the local community.



participants at the Ponders End Participatory Strategic Planning event

Process

The 'focus question' for the strategic planning was: "What do we want to see going on in Ponders End over the next three years?". Discussions around this question were informed by relevant input from the results of a Community Survey and neighbourhood walkabouts carried out in Ponders End during the previous year.

The first session was a vision workshop, in which participants were asked to come up with the specific achievements that they would like to see in Ponders End in three years' time. Emphasis was put on the ideas being practical, specific, realistic, and expressed in the form of an achievement. In other words, what someone might see if they were to visit Ponders End in three years time, achievements actually in place.

After an initial individual brainstorm, the participants were divided into small groups, and each group was asked to identify 7-8 key achievements. These ideas were written on cards and put up on the wall for further discussion and clarification, before being

organised into columns and given titles to reflect the consensus of the group. The usefulness of this practical vision was that it clearly defined the overall goals for the area, and the community were able to incorporate new ideas and activities towards achieving these.

In the next workshop, participants were asked to identify the obstacles or barriers standing between them and their vision. In this case they were encouraged to think about the underlying issues, rather than the symptoms of the problem. Using the same process as before, the underlying contradictions were identified.

The end of this workshop really marked the end of the analytical part of the process, and in the strategic directions workshop the question was addressed of what practical actions the community could take to overcome the obstacles and lead them towards their vision. A similar process was used again, with an additional session at the end of the workshop which enabled the participants to identify the strategic directions themselves, by looking for the common directions lying behind the groups of actions they had put forward.

The final stage was to revisit these actions and to prioritise them in an implementation plan by considering what the community intended to do in the next twelve months. For this workshop the participants were divided by the three strategic directions, with each group identifying the actions that they want to take between October 2001 and September 2002, and ensuring that the actions they selected met the criteria of being 'Specific, Measurable, Appropriate/Achievable, Realistic & Time-bound. In this way the actions themselves could be used as indicators of performance.

Finally, participants assigned responsibilities for the different tasks that had been identified, and interim team leaders were agreed.

Outputs

Each workshop was documented in a one-page chart including every brainstorm idea as well as the resulting group consensus clearly highlighted. A summary version was also produced with photos and graphics, to communicate the plan back to the wider community.

Impacts

Martine Drake was one of the local facilitators of the Participatory Strategic Planning event, and is now a Director and the Treasurer of the Ponders End Community Development Trust. Martine writes:

"Once Neighbourhood Renewal Funding was allocated to the Trust and a dedicated worker could be employed, the Trust made a quick start in delivering community events and infrastructure according to the plan. We were then successful in developing a 3 year lottery proposal using the plan as a basis for the application. Another worker was employed, and the Trust has gone from strength to strength. The plan was not enough on its own to guarantee success, but it has been a valuable reference point for the way forward once resources became available"